

Honorable Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Members of the Appropriations committee. Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, Members of the Labor Committee.

I am Krishan Verma, currently a resident of Suffolk, Virginia. I previously lived in Maine for 50 years.

After 36 years in service to the State of Maine — working for and with intellectually and developmentally disabled people. My work was directly involved with helping Maine Comply with Consent Decree in shutting down Pinelands and providing better, healthier, and more supportive alternatives to institutionalization. My work also involved helping folks getting into the workforce, developing jobs for Mainer's with mental health challenges — former governor Paul LePage's policies forced me, along with thousands of other state employees, to retire in 2016. His purpose was to give income tax breaks for himself and other wealthy Mainers and corporations.

It was a very painful and unjust act done onto me and my family. We subsequently moved to Virginia to enable my extremely qualified wife Rashmi to secure a technology position in Virginia.

She, as well, had served the state of Maine in the information technology department for many years. Unfortunately, she was passed over for a promotion multiple times; she was not a white male, or a Republican, and despite her extensive background and genius-level work, she was overlooked each time.

At this point, I would like to draw your attention to the limitations placed by the LePage administration on the COLA received by Maine state and public service retirees.

Currently, the COLA is limited to a three percent cap on the first \$26,428.98 in pension benefits. This amount limits the cost-of-living increase, and retirees are struggling each month — year after year — to meet expenses. This must be resolved, otherwise retirees who dedicated their careers to the betterment of the State of Maine and our people will keep falling behind, and further lose their financial independence. Maine can and should do better.

My heart longs to return to Maine.

I request the committee take steps to correct the misdeeds of the LePage years and of those who preceded him and — at the very least — apply the COLA on the first \$40,000 of the Maine Public Employees Retirement System pension. I ask that you all seriously consider, why should Mainer's like me, retired state workers on fixed incomes, deserve to fall behind the cost of living? This is not what we signed up for. We State Employees need these financial resources more than the rich and corporations who got tax breaks at our expense in 2011.

I extend my personal and whole-hearted thanks to the committees and to the honorable Senator Rotundo for your consideration.